

Memo

To: Park Advisory Commission
From: Amy Kuras, Park Planner
Colin Smith, Parks & Recreation Services Manager
Date: 9/14/2012
Re: Additional off leash dog areas

In the 2011 – 2015 PROS Plan, the infrastructure needs assessment section identifies a centrally located dog park as a potential new park amenity. Staff has researched the idea of both off-leash, non-fenced areas and additional fenced dog parks. Staff is supportive of adding additional fenced off-leash dog opportunities.

Staff explored the concept of establishing off-leash, non-fenced designated area, and at this time does not support this direction for the following reasons:

1. In researching and talking with other cities that have off leash non-fenced areas, there were many issues that either convinced community reevaluation of the areas, or to eventually fence them. Issues include:

- Dog owners not picking up after dogs in non-monitored areas
- Staff determining that the policing of these areas would not cover the cost of permits
- Dogs not in voice control of the owners despite educational programs and special permitting
- Complaints from residents
- Dogs escaping area and going on to private property
- Feedback from dog owners that the fenced in areas were preferable
- Did not change behavior of dog owners in other parts of City – same amount of unleashed dogs in areas where they were not permitted

2. The process to establish an off leash, non-fenced would be cumbersome, involving changing of the City ordinance, even for a pilot area.

3. Ann Arbor's parks are not as conducive to these types of areas (heavily programmed, natural areas, neighborhood parks) – the parks systems where this has been more successful are generally much larger cities with more staff to oversee areas and more land not in proximity to neighborhoods.

Discussion with other communities regarding off-leash/non-fenced areas:

Bloomington, MN

Has one 24 acre off leash area – not a park, but owned by City.

Was not fenced, but they ended up fencing it about 5 years ago as dogs were going on to private land to access a pond, and dog owners were not respecting property.

Dogs need to have a license and vaccines, but not a permit.

Do not charge fees. After much debate with their park advisory commission, they decided that without staff to police the area, that they would never be able to monitor who purchased a permit or not and that it would be a revenue loss to have staff to keep it up.

User group has taken some ownership – do cleanup days two times/year

Advises us not to have an unfenced area, too problematic

Austin, TX

Nine off leash areas, not fenced. Open area, ground worn, and erosion issues

No guidelines for size of park – need to adjust to what is available

No permits – staff resources too limited. No hours listed, only curfews

Where there are trails, if no one is looking, people just leave feces on the trail. They also leave it in bags on the ground.

Advisory group mentors about dog behavior

Try to plan parks so that they are away from any residences

Lots of complaints from residents who don't like the policy, held public meetings, strong push against new areas. The first park, they just put it in without public meetings. Had to shut it down because of ecoli issues with the water.

Madison, WI

Off leash areas are all fenced. They had an off leash dog park that wasn't fully fenced, only because they didn't have the funds to install one. The dog park users were grateful when a fence was finally installed.

Boulder, CO

Has 3 fenced off leash dog parks, and one off leash non-fenced area in the mountain park.

Not supportive of the off leash non-fenced areas. It has worked, but there have been issues.

They have a green tag program, which is a voice and sight control program, which is where dogs can be off-leash, but dogs must respond to the first call. The owners watch a video, register with the Open Space and Mountain Parks and display that their dogs are under voice and sight control. It has had mixed success.

Burlington, VT

Currently no off leash-non fenced areas, but they are doing a comprehensive review of dog parks and evaluating whether to consider non fenced areas. Report not yet complete.

To establish a new fenced-in area, the following steps should be followed:

1. Determine how many dog parks are desired and in what part of City they should be located
2. Staff and sub-committee establish criteria for ranking locations
3. Identify and visit potential locations, and rate/rank using criteria
4. Report back to PAC in October with results and recommendations for additional fenced dog park(s)
4. Hold public meetings for each location recommended

Examples of Criteria for ranking additional fenced dog park locations:

1. Is the area an adequate size??
2. Is there adequate shade on site?
3. What type of parking is available, if any?
4. Is there access to water?
5. Is there a buffer between the park and surrounding neighbors?
6. Is the area visible from the road?
7. Is the surface well suited for the intended use?
8. What are the potential conflicts?
9. Location within City – what area does the park serve?
10. What investment, if any, would need to be made in order to convert an area for off-leash use?
11. How would the extra maintenance be addressed?
12. Should a citizens group be established for any additional site to steward the dog park area?
13. Will it take away other from neighborhood uses?
14. Relation to PROS plan?

Parks that were previously considered for additional fenced areas:

1. Bandemer Park South – area south of picnic shelter and under M-14 bridge, as well as other lawn area on east side of Huron River. Existing parking would be adequate.
2. Buhr Park – area between Packard Road and tennis courts. Is adjacent to Veterinary clinic, buffered from neighbors but accessible to neighborhood. Maybe too close to Cobblestone and cause event conflicts.
3. Dicken Park – (not Dicken Woods). This is just a panel of grass, small, but not programmed. No parking, would need to park in neighborhood.
4. South Maple – already had a public meeting in 2007 and at that time neighborhood was supportive of proposal. The area has parking, but probably not sufficient. Size was adequate – about 4 acres. Would serve west side of City. Not heavily used site currently.
5. Tuebingen Park – if out-dated exercise equipment is eliminated, this spot is small, but could include part of the woods. No parking at site, but there is parking a couple of blocks away.
6. Ward Park – was considered for off leash area, but was rejected by neighborhood in 2007 because proposal was for non-fenced area. Could be revisited. There is some parking.
7. West Park - on Chapin where house was removed –small site, but currently not used. Parking available, visible from street, lighting.

Areas previously considered that are no longer considered viable:

1. Barton Park – area near parking lot. Parking available, would eliminate picnic space unless it was rather small. It is also a remote site that would be less convenient for many users.
2. Leslie Park - near tennis courts – smaller area, near parking, away from residential, but quite close to Olson Park where an off leash area already exists.
3. Riverside Park – parking available, but park heavily used for league play in evenings. In floodway.
4. Southeast Area Park – at site on Platt Road where house was removed. Now adjacent to existing Swift Run Park.